

# Give a Person Power and He or She Will Show Interpersonal Sensitivity: The Phenomenon and Its Why and When

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The goal of the present research was to investigate whether high or low power leads to more interpersonal sensitivity and what potentially mediates and moderates this effect. In Study 1, 76 participants in either a high- or low-power position interacted; in Study 2, 134 participants were implicitly primed with either high- or low-power or neutral words; and in Study 3, 96 participants were asked to remember a situation in which they felt high or low power (plus a control condition). In Study 4, 157 participants were told to identify with either an egoistic, empathic, or neutral leadership style. In all studies, interpersonal sensitivity, defined as correctly assessing other people, was then measured using different instruments in each study. Consistently, high power resulted in more interpersonal sensitivity than low power. Feeling respected and proud was partially responsible for this effect. Empathic power as a personality trait was related to more interpersonal sensitivity, and high-power individuals who adopted an empathic instead of an egoistic leadership style were more interpersonally sensitive.

*Keywords:* power, interpersonal sensitivity, hierarchy, social perception, accuracy

How power, dominance, or status affects interpersonal interactions in terms of cognition and behavior has lately moved to the forefront of many researchers' attention (Fiske & Dépret, 1996; Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003; Galinsky, Magee, Ines, & Gruenfeld, 2006; Guinote, 2007; Guinote, Judd, & Brauer, 2002; Hall, Coats, & Smith LeBeau, 2005; Hall, Rosip, Smith LeBeau, Horgan, & Carter, 2006; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003; Overbeck & Park, 2001). An unanswered question in this realm concerns the relation between power and interpersonal sensitivity: Is it the high- or the low-power person that does a better job at judging other people? Interpersonal sensitivity is defined in the field in a rather broad way as correctly assessing another person with regard to the person's personality characteristics, emotions, thoughts, or intentions (Hall & Bernieri, 2001). Recently, the concept has been enlarged to comprise also accurate recall of others' verbal messages (Overbeck & Park, 2001) or nonverbal cues (Hall, Murphy, & Schmid Mast, 2006).

Some researchers posit that high-power people are less interpersonally sensitive than low-power people (Fiske, 1993; Galinsky et al., 2006; Goodwin, Gubin, Fiske, & Yzerbyt, 2000; Henley, 1977; Keltner et al., 2003; LaFrance & Henley, 1994), whereas others suggest the opposite (Hall & Halberstadt, 1994; Hall, Halberstadt, & O'Brien, 1997; Overbeck & Park, 2001). We review these positions in detail below. In the present article, a person with high power is defined as an individual who exerts or can exert control or influence over another person. A person with low power is defined as an individual who is subject to another person's control or influence. We predict that people with high power are more interpersonally sensitive than people with low power. In addition to testing this main effect of power on interpersonal sensitivity (Studies 1 to 3), we also wanted to go a step further and understand why high power makes people more interpersonally sensitive than low power (Study 3) by testing the potentially mediating effect of mood on the power–interpersonal sensitivity link. Moreover, we were interested in uncovering the conditions under which high power is related to more interpersonal sensitivity (Studies 3 and 4) by testing the potentially moderating effect of an individual's empathic or egoistic orientation.

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## The Contradictory Views on the Phenomenon

Our prediction that people adopting a high-power position within a hierarchy would be more interpersonally sensitive than people in a low-power position is supported by existing research. For instance, Hall et al. (1997) showed in a meta-analysis that trait measures of power (dominance and capacity for status scales from the California Psychological Inventory; Gough, 1975) and status (social class) were positively related to nonverbal decoding accu-

racy. Also, Rosenthal, Hall, DiMatteo, Rogers, and Archer (1979) reported that in an organizational sample, the superiors performed significantly better on a test of decoding nonverbal cues than the subordinates did, a finding that Hall and Halberstadt (1994) corroborated in a sample of university employees. Moreover, being inhibited and nonassertive as a personality characteristic (thus low power) was related to low facial affect recognition in women (Toner & Gates, 1985). It has to be noted that these were correlational studies and that experimental tests of whether high- or low-power people are better at reading other people's thoughts and feelings are few in number. An experimental approach rules out alternative causal paths, for example, that having high interpersonal sensitivity leads to higher power, or that high and low-power individuals possess different amounts of knowledge about nonverbal cues. Though these paths may have validity, the experimental method restricts attention to the impact of short-term cognitive, emotional, or motivational factors that are produced by the power manipulation.

Also pointing in the direction of a positive link between high power and interpersonal accuracy are results from an experimental study by Overbeck and Park (2001) showing that participants in the high-power role were more likely to remember individuating facts (verbal statements) of low-power interaction partners than vice versa. Remembering a person's nonverbal (Hall, Murphy, & Schmid Mast, 2006) or verbal behavior (Overbeck & Park, 2001) can certainly be regarded as an aspect of interpersonal sensitivity. However, correct *recall* of facts about others is most likely a prerequisite for correct interpersonal assessment, but it does not guarantee it. To correctly infer others' thoughts and feelings, *interpretation* of facts (such as facial expressions and nonverbal cues) is needed. In the present research, we focus on interpersonal sensitivity as correctly inferring other people's thoughts and feelings.

Although there is supporting evidence for our claim, we are also at odds with some existing theorizing and findings about the power–interpersonal sensitivity link. A considerable number of researchers advocate the view that low-power people are more interpersonally sensitive than high-power people (Fiske, 1993; Fiske & Dépret, 1996; Goodwin et al., 2000; Henley, 1977; Keltner et al., 2003). Different reasons are evoked for explaining why. To illustrate, a motivational argument has been put forward saying that high-power people just care less about their subordinates than vice versa, because power holders can afford to have no interest in their subordinates, whereas low-power people are motivated to be more interpersonally sensitive, in order to detect signs of approval or disapproval in their superiors, for example. Moreover, it has been suggested that because one superior usually has many subordinates, the superior is under more cognitive load than the subordinate and thus has reduced cognitive resources that can be used for inferring another person's thoughts and feelings—explaining the poorer performance in interpersonal sensitivity.

The most stringent and practically the only empirical test for the claim that high-power people are less interpersonally sensitive stems from Galinsky et al. (2006, Experiment 3). Participants primed with high power (using an autobiographical memory task, whereby participants were asked to describe a situation in which they felt powerful) made more mistakes in an emotion recognition task compared to a control group (“describe your day yesterday”). Note that the study lacks a comparison with a low-power group,

which makes it thus impossible to tell who is more sensitive, the higher or the lower power person.

In light of these contradictory views and results, the question of whether it is the high- or the low-power individuals who are more interpersonally sensitive deserves more empirical testing.

### The Phenomenon and Its Why

When predicting effects of power on behavior and perception, it is important to consider concomitant emotional, motivational, and cognitive factors in order to understand the mechanism behind the power–interpersonal sensitivity link. And indeed, a person's power position in the hierarchy has been found to evoke specific motivational and emotional states and cognitive processing styles (Berndahl & Martorana, 2006; Guinote, 2007; Keltner et al., 2003; Smith & Trope, 2006; Smith, Wigboldus, & Dijksterhuis, 2008).

Keltner et al.'s (2003) approach–inhibition theory of power posits that low-power individuals are more interpersonally sensitive than high-power individuals. Although we predict the exact opposite, we still base our reasoning on this theory. We concur with Keltner et al. that high-power people approach tasks using a rather global processing style (focusing on the whole rather than on details) and that low-power people approach tasks using a rather local processing style (focusing on details rather than the whole). Existing research confirms that power holders are more inclined toward abstract information processing (Smith, Jostmann, Galinsky, & van Dijk, 2008; Smith & Trope, 2006) and toward a selective processing style with the ability to inhibit peripheral, irrelevant information (Guinote, 2007) compared to people in subordinate positions. People in powerful positions see the forest for the trees (Smith & Trope, 2006), whereas powerless individuals have difficulty inhibiting information in complex tasks (Smith, Wigboldus, & Dijksterhuis, 2008) and pay attention to details (Smith & Trope, 2006)—and thus use a rather local cognitive style. Moreover, in a study where participants were made to use a global processing style, they reported feeling more powerful than participants who used a local processing style (Smith, Wigboldus, & Dijksterhuis, 2008).

Furthermore, according to the Fiske and Neuberg (1990) continuum model, Keltner et al. (2003) posit that a deliberate (local) processing style is linked to more interpersonal sensitivity and that heuristic (global) processing is associated with stereotyping (which is seen as the opposite of interpersonal sensitivity). This is where we differ from Keltner et al. and Fiske and Neuberg, because there is accumulating evidence suggesting that interpersonal decoding profits from a global rather than from a local processing style. For instance, people using a global rather than a local approach were better at identifying other people's feelings (Bombari, Schmid, Lobmaier, Mast, & Schmid Mast, 2009). In the same vein, Ambady and Gray (2002) suggested that a deliberate processing strategy hurts interpersonal accuracy, and Patterson and Stockbridge (1998) showed that when using a first impression strategy (thus abstracting from details), participants were more interpersonally accurate when cognitive demand was high, whereas participants using a more local processing strategy were less accurate under cognitive load.

We thus posit that one explanation of why high power results in more interpersonal sensitivity than low power is a cognitive one: High-power individuals adopt a global information processing

style that is in turn related to more interpersonal sensitivity, and correspondingly, low-power individuals adopt a local information processing style that is related to less interpersonal sensitivity.

Besides this cognitive explanation of why high power is related to increased interpersonal sensitivity, it is also possible to state an emotional explanation. The approach–inhibition theory of power (Keltner et al., 2003) suggests that elevated power increases a person's expression and experience of positive emotions and that reduced power increases negative emotions. Berdahl and Martorana (2006) confirmed these predictions experimentally and showed that leaders experienced and expressed more positive emotions (e.g., happiness and interest) than negative ones (e.g., anger, contempt, discomfort, fear, and guilt) and that subordinates showed the opposite pattern. Moreover, there is evidence that negative emotions decrease interpersonal sensitivity. For instance, sad mood impaired facial emotion recognition relative to a neutral condition (Chepenik, Cornew, & Farah, 2007), and sad as well as depressed participants performed worse on an interpersonal decoding task than happy participants or participants in a neutral mood (Ambady & Gray, 2002). Also, social anxiety was negatively correlated with nonverbal decoding skills (Schroeder, 1995). Based on the evidence that negative emotions such as sadness or anxiety hurt accuracy, one would predict that low-power individuals are less interpersonally sensitive, because they experience more negative emotions, as mentioned above. Conversely, if high-power individuals are more prone to experiencing positive emotions, these emotions might bring about increased sensitivity. Note, however, that in Studies 1 and 2 by Ambady and Gray (2002), inducing happy mood did not affect interpersonal accuracy (compared to the control group). However, the scarcity of research that tests the effect of positive mood on interpersonal decoding makes predictions difficult.

As a second possible explanation of why high power leads to more interpersonal sensitivity and low power to less interpersonal sensitivity, we therefore suggest that high-power individuals experience more positive emotions which are in turn related to more interpersonal sensitivity, and that low-power individuals experience more negative emotions which are related to less interpersonal sensitivity.

### The Phenomenon and Its When

Because there are contradicting views and contradicting empirical results on the direction of the main effect of power on interpersonal accuracy, we suspect that there are moderating factors at work. Indeed, there is accumulating evidence suggesting that it is sometimes not so much power per se that is driving a specific outcome. For instance, personality factors, such as whether a person has a communal or exchange relationship orientation, affected how power was manifested. Exchange oriented individuals exerted power in a more egoistic way, whereas communally oriented individuals showed more empathic behavior (Chen, Lee-Chai, & Bargh, 2001). And, in the Lammers, Galinsky, Gordijn, and Otten (2008) study, only when the power position was legitimate did the powerful show more approach behavior than the powerless, but not if the power position was illegitimate.

Galinsky et al. (2006) showed that high-power individuals are more self-focused, whereas low-power individuals are more other-focused. We believe that this distinction is crucial in explaining the

link between power and interpersonal sensitivity. However, we do not believe that the self–other distinction is the major dividing line between high- and low-power individuals. Rather we think that high-power individuals can be either self-focused (i.e., showing an egoistic leadership style focusing on the leader's needs and advancement) or other-focused (i.e., showing an empathic, prosocial leadership style focusing on the subordinates' needs and advancement). Similar to the moderating effects of the relationship-orientation of the powerful in the Chen et al. (2001) study, we predict that depending on how power is conceived, more or less interpersonal sensitivity will result. More specifically, we expect that people adopting an empathic instead of an egoistic leadership style will show more interpersonal sensitivity. Both experimental (Klein & Hodges, 2001) and correlational (Hall, Andrzejewski, & Yopchick, in press) studies show that empathy is positively associated with accuracy on interpersonal sensitivity tests. Moreover, individuals who are concerned with and interested in social relationships (people with a pronounced need to belong) have enhanced interpersonal sensitivity (Pickett, Gardner, & Knowles, 2004). We thus expect that the empathic as opposed to egoistic orientation can explain why different studies find different results on the question of whether high-power individuals are more or less interpersonally sensitive.

### The Present Research

When we are interested in measuring how good a job people do when trying to infer others' thoughts and feelings, we should use an interpersonal sensitivity task measuring just that. Instead, many researchers operationalize interpersonal sensitivity as the amount of attention a person pays to individuating information about another person or as the number of details a person remembers about another person (Fiske, 1993; Goodwin et al., 2000; Hall, Carter, & Horgan, 2001; Keltner et al., 2003; Overbeck & Park, 2001).

Moreover, in the place of study designs that yield only correlational evidence (Hall & Halberstadt, 1994; Hall et al., 1997) a more rigorous experimental approach is needed in order to state the causal influence of power on interpersonal sensitivity. Also, it is crucial to compare a high- to a low-power group instead of comparing only a high-power to a control group (Galinsky et al., 2006). The latter design cannot answer the question of whether there is a difference between the high- and low-power people in interpersonal sensitivity. Because we are interested in answering the question as to whether there is a difference in interpersonal sensitivity between high- and low-power individuals, we included both of these conditions (and a control condition for some of the studies).

Some might argue that the relation of power to interpersonal sensitivity should be tested in terms of ability to decode a live interaction partner rather than stimulus people in an audiovisual test. But with testing interpersonal sensitivity in a face-to-face dyadic interaction there is the problem of confounding the target's expressiveness with the perceiver's interpersonal sensitivity (Hall, Rosip, et al., 2006; Snodgrass, Hecht, & Ploutz-Snyder, 1998). More specifically, some studies examined interpersonal sensitivity within a live-interaction paradigm, whereby participants assigned to high- or low-power roles were asked to decode each other's expressions. Though subordinates were generally more interper-

sonally sensitive than superiors, this effect was due entirely to the difference in the clarity of superiors' and subordinates' expressions (Hall, Rosip, et al., 2006; Snodgrass et al., 1998). Subordinates' expressions were more difficult to decode, producing poorer decoding in the superiors. Gonzaga, Keltner, and Ward (2008) also used the dyadic paradigm and found that the less powerful person was more accurate at judging the more powerful person's emotions than vice versa. However, in that study there was no adequate examination of emotional expressiveness, so one cannot tell whether the power effect was due to perceptiveness or expressiveness. On balance, the dyadic paradigm does not support the claim that low power confers an advantage in sensitivity. To avoid the problem of target expressiveness we did not use face-to-face interactions in the present investigations. We presented the same targets on videotape to all participants by using the standardized empathic accuracy paradigm (Ickes, 1997, 2003) in Studies 1 and 2, a standardized emotion recognition task (the facial expressions test from the Diagnostic Analysis of Nonverbal Accuracy [DANVA-2]; Nowicki & Duke, 1994) in Study 3, and a standardized nonverbal decoding task (Profile of Nonverbal Sensitivity [PONS]; Rosenthal et al., 1979) in Study 4 (see *Method* sections for details).

### Study 1

The goal of Study 1 was to see whether an assigned high- or low-power role affects interpersonal sensitivity. We predict individuals in a high-power role to be more interpersonally sensitive than individuals in a low-power role.

### Method

#### Participants

Students at the University of Zurich majoring in different fields participated in a dyadic interaction (32 women, 44 men) for 1 hr. The average age of the participants was 27 years ( $SD = 5.74$ ); they were all Caucasians.

#### Procedure

Upon arrival, participants were randomly assigned to be either the leader (high-power role) or the leader's assistant (low-power role) for a subsequent dyadic interaction. Only same-gender dyads were used (16 female–female dyads, 22 male–male dyads) and participants in the same dyad did not know each other. To ensure that participants identified with their high- or low-power roles, they interacted in their respective roles for a period of 8 min. Their task during the interaction was to rank a list of items needed for survival in a lifeboat on the open sea (Pfeiffer & Jones, 1970). They were told that the leader was responsible for the quality of the task solution, for structuring the task, and for time management and that the subordinate would contribute ideas. Because we wanted the roles to differ on the dimension of power only, we created the roles with the objective to make them equally attractive to participants. Existing literature shows that this goal can be achieved through careful formulation of what each role entails (Schmid Mast & Hall, 2003).

After the interaction, both the leader and the assistant indicated how powerful and competent they felt during the interaction and

how much they liked their assigned role. Participants remained in their respective roles of superior and subordinate and separately performed the same interpersonal sensitivity task.

#### Manipulation Check

We assessed how powerful and how competent each participant felt during the interaction as well as how much each participant liked the assigned role. On a scale from 1 (*do not agree at all*) to 6 (*agree very much*) participants indicated how much they agreed with each statement. Felt powerfulness was assessed using four items, such as "I tried to control the interaction" or "I felt dominant," which were averaged (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .74$ ,  $M = 3.71$ ,  $SD = 0.85$ ). Felt competence was assessed using two items: "I felt up to the task" and "I felt competent" ( $r = .69$ ,  $p < .0001$ ;  $M = 4.26$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ). How much each participant liked the assigned role was assessed using two items: "I felt comfortable in the assigned role" and "I did not feel at ease with the assigned role" (reverse scored;  $r = .63$ ,  $p < .0001$ ;  $M = 4.21$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ).

#### Interpersonal Sensitivity

Because we focus on interpersonal sensitivity as correct inference of others' thoughts and feelings, we operationalized interpersonal sensitivity using Ickes's (1997, 2003) empathic accuracy paradigm. Participants watched videotaped interactions of three different target dyads. Each target dyad was composed of a real superior with his or her real subordinate (a male superior with a female subordinate at a Swiss Army recruiting center, a female superior with a female subordinate at a Swiss university cleaning service, and a male superior with a male subordinate at the information technology branch of an international company). Each target dyad was videotaped for 8 min while solving a survival task (Pfeiffer & Jones, 1970). After solving the task, targets watched the videotapes individually and were instructed to stop the tape each time they had had a thought or a feeling during the interaction and to report it on a sheet of paper along with the corresponding time stamp on the videotape (*actual* thought or feeling). We selected a 3-min excerpt of the entire 8-min interaction of each dyad. The selection criterion for the excerpt was the subordinate having had reported eight thoughts or feelings within the 3-min time window.

Participants watched the video excerpts, and the experimenter stopped the tape at the precise moment when the subordinate target individual reported having had a thought or feeling (8 stops per dyad, 24 stops total). Participants were instructed to infer the thought or feeling of the target subordinate each time the video was stopped and to write it down on a sheet of paper (*inferred* thought or feeling). For each stop, participants were given 45 s to write down their answers.

Interpersonal sensitivity was the degree of similarity between the *actual* and the *inferred* thoughts and feelings rated by two coders on a scale of 0 (*not similar at all*), 1 (*somewhat similar*), and 2 (*similar*) (following Ickes, 1997, 2003). Interrater reliability was  $r = .96$ . For each participant, the scores for each of the 24 *inferred* thoughts or feelings were averaged ( $M = 0.47$ ,  $SD = 0.18$ ).

### Results

The role assignment was intended to elicit more feelings of powerfulness in the leader compared to the assistant. Also, we expected the leader and the assistant not to differ in their feelings of competence in solving the task, because we assigned the roles randomly. Moreover, we expected both roles to be equally attractive, and thus leaders and assistants not to differ in how much they liked their assigned roles, because we created the roles with this goal in mind. This is indeed the pattern of results that we found. Assigned leaders felt more powerful ( $M = 3.94$ ) during the interaction than assigned assistants ( $M = 3.47$ ),  $t(74) = 2.48$ ,  $p = .016$ , effect size  $r = .28$ . However, there was no difference in felt competence,  $t(74) = 1.60$ ,  $p = .114$ , and no difference in liking the role,  $t(74) = 1.15$ ,  $p = .25$ .

We calculated a 2 (participant gender)  $\times$  2 (role: high vs. low power) analysis of variance (ANOVA) with interpersonal sensitivity as the dependent variable. Results showed a significant role main effect in the predicted direction,  $F(1, 72) = 4.91$ ,  $p = .03$ , effect size  $r = .25$ , with leaders being more interpersonally sensitive ( $M = 0.52$ ) than assistants ( $M = 0.43$ ). There was no significant gender main effect,  $F(1, 72) = 2.15$ ,  $p = .147$ , effect size  $r = .17$  ( $M$  women = 0.51,  $M$  men = 0.45), and no significant interaction effect,  $F(1, 72) = 0.18$ ,  $p = .67$ , effect size  $r = .05$ .

### Discussion

Study 1 confirmed our prediction and showed that high-power people were more interpersonally sensitive than low-power people. Because participants inferred the thoughts and feelings of subordinates only, there is possible confounding in Study 1. High-power people might have been more interpersonally sensitive not because they were in a high-power role but because they were assessing people of a lower status, whereas low-power participants were assessing people of the same status. However, one might argue that the task should have been easier for participants in the subordinate role, because they assessed people of the same status. Thus, the fact that the results showed superiors do a better job at assessing others can be seen as even bolstering the strength of the result found. However, to remedy this possible confound, in Study 2 we used the same videotaped target dyads as in Study 1 but had participants infer the thoughts and feelings of both the high- and low-power targets.

In Study 1, participants were aware of their assigned power, and, consistent with the allocated role, participants in the high-power role reported feeling more powerful than participants in the low-power role. Because participants were aware of the fact that they acted within the framework of an assigned role, the result might have been caused by variables related to the role assignment. For instance, although leaders and assistants identified equally well with the assigned roles, the leaders possibly complied more with the experimental task and therefore were more motivated to put effort into the interpersonal sensitivity task than the assistants were. Maybe this extra motivation was due to them feeling treated more favorably by having obtained the high-power role (although they knew that the roles had been assigned randomly).

Alternatively, being the leader was probably a role that our participants found especially interesting, because they are not used to being in a superior position (note that they all were students),

and perhaps as a consequence they were motivated to do well and put in extra effort. However, we did not find any indication that there were differences on a motivational level, because both high- and low-power participants indicated the same level of liking the role. To control for motivational effects related to the conscious adoption of a high- or a low-power role that might be driving the effect, we created a situation in which participants were unaware of being in the high- versus low-power condition for Study 2. We used a more implicit way to prime power.

### Study 2

Participants primed with high power were predicted to be more interpersonally sensitive than people primed with low power. Additionally, we wanted to find out whether high-power priming increased and low-power priming decreased interpersonal sensitivity in comparison to a neutral priming condition. We predicted a linearly decreasing level of interpersonal sensitivity with high-power, neutral, and low-power priming.

### Method

#### Participants

A total of 134 students (61 men, 73 women) recruited in colleges in the vicinity of Zurich, Switzerland and majoring in different fields participated either alone or in groups of up to 25 people ( $M$  age = 26 years,  $SD = 7.23$ ; all participants were Caucasians).

#### Procedure

Participants performed a word completion task followed by an interpersonal sensitivity task. They were told that we were interested in finding out how verbal ability affects interpersonal sensitivity. The word completion task was used to prime participants with either high or low power or with neutral words (random assignment to one of the three conditions). After the word completion task, participants' interpersonal sensitivity was measured using a standard stimulus empathic accuracy paradigm similar to the one used in Study 1. To ensure that the priming was implicit, participants were probed for suspicion and excluded from the analysis if they suspected that the word completion task was related to the interpersonal sensitivity task (11 participants; the total  $N$  of 134 does not include the 11 excluded participants). All participants were subsequently debriefed.

#### Measures

**Word completion task.** Each version of the word completion task (neutral, dominant, subordinate) consisted of 40 fragmented words (e.g., "po\_er," "su\_or\_inate"). Twenty (neutral) words were identical in all three conditions. The other 20 prime words in each condition were associated with either dominance or subordination or were neutral. The prime words were selected from an initial list of 660 words (adjectives and nouns) that were rated in a pretest in terms of dominance–submissiveness on a 7-point scale ( $-3 =$  characteristic of a submissive person,  $0 =$  neither characteristic of a submissive nor a dominant person,  $+3 =$  characteristic of a dominant person) by two raters. For this pretest, dominance was

described to the raters as follows: "Characteristics of a high status, powerful, or dominant person are: has or wants to have control and influence over another person, can attain his or her goals despite resistance of others, likes to take on leadership." Submissiveness was described as follows: "Characteristics of a low status, submissive, or dependent person are: is under the control or influence of another person, puts his or her goals second, does not like to take on leadership." The words were also rated in terms of valence ( $-3 = \text{negative}$ ,  $0 = \text{neutral}$ ,  $+3 = \text{positive}$ ) by two different raters. The scales were transformed to range from 1 to 7. We selected the 20 words for each condition such that they were clearly different on the dominance–submissiveness dimension but matched for valence, word length, and word frequency. It was particularly important to control for valence effects among the three priming conditions, because we wanted the conditions to differ exclusively on the dominance dimension and not to induce different mood states in participants.

Sample words for the high-power condition were *royal*, *leadership*, *influential*, *control*, and *dominant*. Sample words for the low-power condition were *obey*, *subordinate*, *serve*, *slave*, and *submissive*. Sample words for the neutral condition were *driver*, *cross*, *sprinter*, and *exchange*.<sup>1</sup>

The pretest showed that the 20 dominant ( $M = 6.28$ ,  $SD = 0.09$ ), 20 neutral ( $M = 3.85$ ,  $SD = 0.09$ ), and 20 submissive words ( $M = 1.58$ ,  $SD = 0.09$ ) were rated as significantly different on the dominance–submissiveness dimension,  $F(2, 57) = 668.20$ ,  $p = .0001$  (all Bonferroni post hoc comparisons:  $p = .0001$ ). However, there was no difference in valence,  $F(2, 57) = 0.03$ ,  $p = .975$ ; word length,  $F(2, 57) = 0.02$ ,  $p = .981$ ; and word frequency,  $F(2, 57) = 0.03$ ,  $p = .975$ , among the three conditions. Also, in an additional pretest, the word completion task was perceived as equally difficult in each condition,  $F(2, 57) = 0.10$ ,  $p = .904$ , as rated by 4 people on a scale of 1 (*too easy*), 2 (*just right*), or 3 (*too hard*).

**Interpersonal sensitivity.** Similar to Study 1 we used the same three videotaped 8-min dyadic interactions and again selected 3-min segments with eight stops for each dyad (24 stops total). In Study 1, participants assessed only subordinates. In Study 2, however, we selected four stops for each dyad member, so that participants assessed a total of 12 thoughts or feelings of the superior and 12 thoughts or feelings of the subordinate across the three dyads.<sup>2</sup> Interpersonal sensitivity was calculated as in Study 1 ( $M = 0.85$ ,  $SD = 0.26$ ; reliability of two coders,  $r = .84$ ).

### Results

To test whether high-power priming resulted in more interpersonal sensitivity than low-power priming we conducted a 2 (participant gender)  $\times$  3 (priming: high power, low power, neutral) ANOVA with interpersonal sensitivity as the dependent variable. According to prediction, results showed a significant priming main effect,  $F(2, 128) = 2.51$ ,  $p = .042$  (one-tailed), effect size  $r = .14$ , showing that participants who were primed with high power were more interpersonally sensitive ( $M = 0.90$ ) than participants who were primed with low power ( $M = 0.78$ ) and that neutral participants lay in between ( $M = 0.84$ ; see Figure 1). A planned contrast calculation (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1991) between the high-power and the low-power conditions (equivalent to a linear trend contrast) showed a significant difference,  $t_{\text{contrast}}(128) = 2.36$ ,  $p < .01$

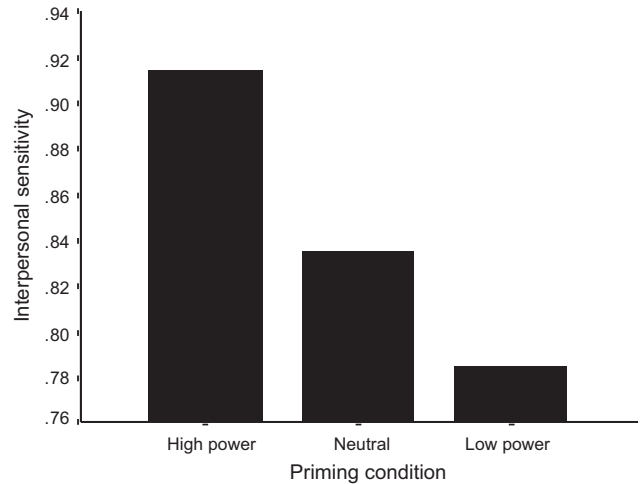


Figure 1. Interpersonal sensitivity depending on priming condition (Study 2). Theoretical range of interpersonal sensitivity was between 0 and 2.

(one-tailed), effect size  $r = .20$ . The contrast between the high-power and the neutral condition yielded a difference that approached significance,  $t_{\text{contrast}}(128) = 1.50$ ,  $p < .10$ , effect size  $r = .13$ , whereas the contrast between the low-power and the neutral condition was nonsignificant,  $t_{\text{contrast}}(128) = 0.91$ ,  $p > .10$ , effect size  $r = .08$ . This confirmed our prediction of a linear decrease in interpersonal sensitivity from high to neutral to low power.

Also, there was a significant gender main effect,  $F(1, 128) = 4.58$ ,  $p = .034$ , effect size  $r = .19$ , with women being more interpersonally sensitive ( $M = 0.91$ ) than men ( $M = 0.78$ ).<sup>3</sup> There was no significant interaction effect,  $F(1, 128) = 0.64$ ,  $p = .53$ .

### Discussion

Study 2 replicated the result found in Study 1 and confirmed our prediction: The high-power primed person was more interpersonally sensitive than the low-power primed person. Additionally, high-power priming relatively increased and low-power priming relatively decreased interpersonal sensitivity (with neutral in between, as tested by the linear contrast). Moreover, in Study 2, participants assessed both leaders and followers, and we can therefore conclude that the result found in Study 1 is not due to same-status as opposed to opposite-status judgments.

Study 2 ruled out any motivational factors related to the high- or low-power position of the participant because of the implicit power priming procedure. Although we cannot be absolutely sure

<sup>1</sup> The original words used were in German. Sample words in German for the high-power condition were *königlich*, *Führung*, *einflussreich*, *lenken*, and *dominant*. Sample words in German for the low-power condition were *gehorschen*, *Untergebener*, *dienen*, *Sklave*, and *unterordnen*. Sample words for the neutral condition were *Fahrer*, *kreuzen*, *Läufer*, and *Wechsel*.

<sup>2</sup> Target status did not affect the interpersonal sensitivity results, and for that reason it is not discussed any further.

<sup>3</sup> The gender effect is not discussed, because it was not the focus of the present article.

that the power priming did not activate different emotional states in the participants, we controlled for this effect at the level of the stimuli by matching the valence of the stimulus words among the three conditions.

If motivational and emotional states can be ruled out as the influencing factors explaining the results, why then were the high-power primed individuals more interpersonally sensitive? As stated in the introduction, we assume that mood and information processing style are two potential mediators of the power–interpersonal sensitivity link. Because we find it unlikely that the priming elicited different emotional states in participants, we believe that the power priming activated a certain information processing style (global for high-power primed individuals and local for low-power primed individuals), which then accounted for the difference in performance on the interpersonal sensitivity task. Research has shown that people in powerful positions use a more global cognitive style compared to people in powerless positions (Guinote, 2007; Smith & Trope, 2006; Smith, Wigboldus, & Dijksterhuis, 2008). We thus assume that the power priming activated the concomitant cognitive information processing style in the participants. Activation means that the particular processing style becomes more accessible to the individual without him or her necessarily being aware of that (Bargh, Lombardi, & Higgins, 1988). Because using a global processing style compared to a local one has been shown to increase interpersonal sensitivity (Ambady & Gray, 2002; Bombari et al., 2009; Patterson & Stockbridge, 1998), the participants primed with high power were more interpersonally sensitive than participants primed with low power. Note that we did not measure the information processing style of our participants, and we can thus only speculate about the underlying mechanism.

To explain why we found different results from what other researchers predicted or found (Fiske, 1993; Fiske & Dépret, 1996; Galinsky et al., 2006; Goodwin et al., 2000; Henley, 1977; Keltner et al., 2003), we proposed in the introduction that the way power is understood moderates the effect, in that increased interpersonal sensitivity might result only when power is understood as other-oriented or empathic as opposed to self-centered or egoistic. This reasoning is based on research showing that empathy is related to increased interpersonal sensitivity (Hall et al., in press; Klein & Hodges, 2001). If for one reason or another, self-focused, egoistic aspects of power were primed in the Galinsky et al. (2006) Experiment 3 as opposed to other-focused, empathic power priming in our study, this might explain the differences in the results. In line with this reasoning, Galinsky et al. showed in their Experiments 1 and 2 that the priming that they used in Experiment 3 rendered the high-power people more self-focused or egoistic and low-power individuals more other-focused or empathic. To find out whether the different results were really due to us using a different power manipulation that maybe activated a different aspect of power, we conducted Study 3 using the same power priming procedure as in the Galinsky et al. study.

### Study 3

In order to show that the results of Studies 1 and 2 are not specific to the paradigm used, we conducted Study 3 as, at the same time, a replication and extension of the Galinsky et al. (2006) Experiment 3. As in Galinsky et al., we used the facial expressions

test of the DANVA-2 (Nowicki & Duke, 1994)—a test of emotion recognition—as the interpersonal sensitivity measure. Extending the Galinsky et al. study and paralleling our Study 2, we used the Galinsky et al. power manipulation but with three conditions (thus including the low-power condition missing in the Galinsky et al. experiment): high power, low power, and neutral.

Additionally, we wanted to test whether activating the low-power concept could have entailed (unconscious) negative feelings such as sadness or anxiety, which can hurt accuracy (Ambady & Gray, 2002; Chepenik et al., 2007; Schroeder, 1995). It is also possible that positive feelings might enhance performance. To address the question of whether positive or negative affect resulting from the high- or low-power priming is responsible for the results found, participants' mood in each of the priming conditions was assessed in Study 3.

### Method

#### Participants

Participants were 96 undergraduate students (47 men, 49 women) at Northeastern University, recruited from the Psychology Department's research participant pool and compensated with partial course credit. Of 102 participants originally in the sample, 6 were excluded due to outlier values ( $>2$  SDs below the mean) on the test of interpersonal sensitivity (described below), yielding the final  $N$  of 96. Demographic characteristics were not measured, but this population typically consists of 71% White, 13% Asian or Asian American, 7% Hispanic, 6% African American, and 3% "other" races or ethnicities.

#### Procedure

Participants were run in groups of 1, 2, or 3 in a laboratory room and were randomly assigned to high-power, low-power, or control conditions; participants in the same session were never in the same experimental (priming) condition. Participants were told the following:

In this experiment we are studying how people think about and react to social cues. You will be doing a writing exercise, viewing pictures of people, and filling in some questionnaires. The first task is a writing exercise in which you will write about certain kinds of experiences from your life. Different participants will be writing about different things.

Participants were seated so that they could not read each other's writing, and they were told that there was no time limit. Each was given a sheet with the heading "Reflection Exercise" followed by the instructions, with the remainder of the page consisting of double-spaced lines. To ensure honesty and privacy, the experimenter explained that participants would put their writing samples into a sealed box that would not be opened until the end of the semester.

The wording of the experimental manipulations followed Galinsky et al. (2003, 2006).

High-power condition: Please recall a particular incident in which you had power over another individual or individuals. By power, we mean a situation in which you controlled the ability of another person or persons to get something they wanted, or were in a position to

evaluate those individuals. Please describe this situation in which you had power—what happened, how you felt, etc.

Low-power condition: Please recall a particular incident in which someone else had power over you. By power, we mean a situation in which someone had control over your ability to get something you wanted, or was in a position to evaluate you. Please describe this situation in which you did not have power—what happened, how you felt, etc.

Control condition: We would like you to recall your day yesterday. In the space below, describe your day, including thoughts, feelings, events, etc.

Immediately following the writing exercise, participants were administered the DANVA-2 Adult Facial Expressions Test (Nowicki & Duke, 1994). Twenty-four color slides of male and female faces expressing four emotions (happiness, sadness, anger, and fear) were projected for 2 s each. Following each slide, participants circled which of the same four emotions was being expressed. Overall accuracy for the DANVA-2 was  $M = 18.54$ , range = 11–23,  $SD = 2.70$ .

### Postexperimental Questions

After completing the DANVA-2, participants were asked to rate in a random order 15 specific feelings they had while thinking about the situation and incidents that they had described in the “reflection exercise” on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*very*). Principal components analysis with varimax rotation produced a highly interpretable four-factor solution: Factor 1 (labeled “happy”) consisted of happy, angry (reversed), cheerful, and optimistic; Factor 2 (labeled “sad”) consisted of sad, gloomy, and depressed; Factor 3 (labeled “powerful”) consisted of dominant, powerful, and strong; and Factor 4 (labeled “anxious”) consisted of anxious, tense, and fearful. Two other ratings loaded on more than one factor (aggravated and resentful) and were therefore left separate. Composite scores for the four factors were created by averaging their respective items with unit weighting.

Moreover, participants filled in the Revised NEO Personality Inventory (Costa & McCrae, 1992) and a measure of sociable and aggressive dominance (Kalma, Visser, & Peeters, 1993). Sociable dominance is measured by items such as “People turn to me for decisions” or “I like taking responsibility,” and aggressive dominance is assessed by items such as “I make smart, sarcastic remarks if people deserve it” or “I find it important to get my way, even if this causes a row.” By calculating a principal components analysis with varimax rotation of the five NEO personality dimensions and sociable and aggressive dominance, two factors were obtained: “empathic power,” composed of sociable dominance, extraversion, conscientiousness, and reversed neuroticism, and “egoistic power,” composed of aggressive dominance and reversed agreeableness.

### Coding of Stories

A research assistant rated every writing sample for 13 affective states of the participant, using scales from 0 (*none at all*) to 9 (*a great deal*). For each rated item, the coder used a glossary of synonyms that helped to guide the ratings (e.g., for “shame” the synonyms were feelings of guilt, regret, remorse, or self-blame).

The coder made the ratings based on what feelings the participant described, keeping inference to a minimum. Intercoder reliability, tested as the Pearson correlation against an independent coder for 10 randomly selected stories, had a median of .89 with two exceptions. For the item “seen as incompetent,” variance was too low for reliability to be calculated, but this item was retained; for the item “disappointed/sad,” reliability was unacceptably low, and the item was dropped from further analysis.

A principal components analysis of the remaining story ratings (with varimax rotation) produced three very clear factors. Factor 1 consisted of angry, disrespected, seen unjustly by others, seen as incompetent by others, and powerless, and Factor 2 consisted of proud, respected, and powerful. Factor 3 was defined uniquely by anxiety. These factors are informative, because they show that self-ratings of lower power were associated with negative feelings and self-ratings of higher power were associated with positive feelings. However, for clarity in subsequent analyses, we performed another principal components analysis that omitted the powerful and powerless items, so that they could be analyzed separately from affect per se. This analysis produced three clear factors. Factor 1 (labeled “outrage”) consisted of angry, disrespected, seen unjustly by others, and seen as incompetent by others. Factor 2 (labeled “happy pride”) consisted of proud, respected, anxious (reversed), and happy. Factor 3 was defined uniquely by shame. The stress item loaded on more than one factor and was therefore left separate. The outrage and happy pride composites were created with unit weighting. An additional variable was calculated from the two items explicitly about power. Labeled “bipolar power,” this was calculated by subtracting the powerless rating from the powerful rating (this was justified, because these two items were strongly negatively correlated,  $r[60] = -.88$ ,  $p < .001$ , across the two power prime conditions, and  $r[94] = -.42$ ,  $p < .001$ , across all three conditions).

## Results

### Correlations of Self-Ratings With Story Ratings

Correlations between the self-ratings of affect and the story ratings indicated that there was a high degree of correspondence between what participants said about their feelings and what they wrote in their stories. All of the conceptually matching ratings were significantly related. For example, the powerful composite from the self-ratings was correlated with the bipolar power composite from the story ratings,  $r(94) = .46$ ,  $p < .001$ . The happiness composite from the self-ratings was correlated with the happy pride composite from the story ratings,  $r(94) = .50$ ,  $p < .001$ . The self-ratings of aggravated and resentful were correlated with the outrage composite from the story ratings,  $r(94) = .36$  and  $.44$ , respectively, both  $ps < .001$ , as well as with stress rated from the stories,  $r(94) = .42$  and  $.44$ , respectively, both  $ps < .001$ . These correlations indicate congruence between self-rated affective mood and story content.

### Manipulation Checks

The first two rows of Table 1 show that the manipulations produced the predicted feelings of power. A one-way ANOVA that had priming condition (high power, low power, and control) as the

Table 1  
Impact of Power Primes, Study 3

Variable	High power	Low power	Control	F ratio
Powerful composite (self-ratings)	5.03 (2.33)	3.06 (2.15)	3.20 (1.68)	8.72***
Bipolar power composite (story ratings)	7.90 (3.00)	-6.39 (3.99)	-0.32 (1.04)	84.16***
DANVA-2	19.66 (2.07)	18.00 (2.89)	18.12 (2.76)	3.76*
Self-rated affect				
Happy (4 items)	5.72 (1.50)	3.70 (1.33)	5.85 (1.83)	19.22***
Sad (3 items)	2.23 (1.39)	3.52 (1.89)	2.80 (2.12)	3.78*
Anxious (3 items)	3.25 (1.68)	3.09 (1.89)	3.47 (1.76)	0.38
Aggravated	3.69 (0.47)	5.85 (0.44)	3.97 (0.44)	6.89**
Resentful	2.66 (2.09)	4.85 (2.40)	2.06 (1.92)	15.46***
Story affect				
Outrage (4 items)	0.19 (0.30)	3.21 (0.28)	0.30 (0.28)	35.90***
Happy pride (4 items)	5.20 (0.33)	2.30 (0.31)	3.15 (0.30)	21.71***
Stress	2.21 (0.55)	5.94 (0.52)	2.91 (0.51)	14.18***
Shame	0.66 (0.18)	0.09 (0.17)	0.18 (0.16)	3.1*

Note. All degrees of freedom are 2, 93. Standard deviations are in parentheses. DANVA-2 = Diagnostic Analysis of Nonverbal Accuracy.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

independent variable and the self-rated powerful factor as the dependent variable was highly significant, with participants describing themselves as feeling the most powerful in the high-power condition. Similarly, the corresponding analysis based on the bipolar power composite coded from the participants' stories was also highly significant, with rated power being high for stories in the high-power condition, low for stories in the low-power condition, and intermediate for control stories.

#### Impact of Power Primes on Interpersonal Sensitivity

The same one-way ANOVA was performed on the DANVA-2 total score. As shown in the third row of Table 1, the priming effect was significant overall. The linear contrast was  $F(1, 93) = 6.04, p < .05$ , effect size  $r = .25$ . The contrast between high power and control was also significant,  $F(1, 93) = 5.20, p < .05$ , effect size  $r = .23$ . The low-power and control conditions did not differ ( $F < 1$ ). These results indicate that high power increased sensitivity but low power did not decrease sensitivity, compared to the neutral power condition. When participant gender was added to this model, neither the participant gender main effect nor the interaction was significant ( $p > .40$ ).

#### Impact of Power Primes on Affect

To explore how affective states were influenced by the power primes, additional one-way ANOVAs were performed, as Table 1 shows. Nearly all of the self- and story ratings showed a significant condition effect, consistent with what one might expect (positive affect elevated in high-power condition or diminished in low-power condition, negative affect elevated in low-power condition). Generally, the control condition mean was intermediate between the high- and low-power means.

#### Controlling for Affect When Examining Impact of Power Primes on Interpersonal Sensitivity

In order to test the mediating effect of affect for the power-interpersonal sensitivity relation, we controlled for affect when

examining the impact of the power primes on interpersonal sensitivity. This was done by adding the affect variables as covariates in the one-way ANOVA model described above (one at a time), using interpersonal sensitivity as the dependent variable. Adding the covariates had only limited impact on the priming effects. Some of the priming effects became slightly more significant and some slightly less significant, compared to the original (uncovariated) effect reported above. The only variable to have a marked diminishing effect was the happy pride composite from the story ratings; when this was entered as a covariate, the original effect of the power primes on decoding accuracy was eliminated,  $F(2, 92) = 1.17, p < .33$ .

To investigate this further, we unpacked the happy pride composite and calculated regression models testing whether felt pride, felt respect, felt happiness, and felt low anxiety (the ingredients of the happy pride composite) mediated the effect of power priming on interpersonal sensitivity. Condition was coded as 1 = low power and 2 = high power (controls omitted). Although the Sobel tests were not significant ( $Z = 1.19, p = .23$ , and  $Z = 0.94, p = .35$ , for felt respected and felt pride, respectively), felt pride and felt respect both partially mediated (Baron & Kenny, 1986) the effect of power priming on interpersonal sensitivity (see Figure 2). Note that neither felt happiness nor felt low anxiety was a mediator.

#### How Different Types of Personality Dominance Correlated With Interpersonal Sensitivity

Note that the types of personality dominance were created based on the self-report personality scales; they do not stem from the participants' autobiographical writing. Therefore, this analysis addresses our question in quite a different, but converging, manner. Calculating a regression analysis with empathic power, egoistic power, gender (dummy coded), and the interaction between empathic and egoistic power as independent variables and the DANVA-2 scores as the dependent variable yielded a significant positive relation between empathic power and interpersonal sensitivity ( $\beta = .22, p = .033$ ), without any significant effects of the

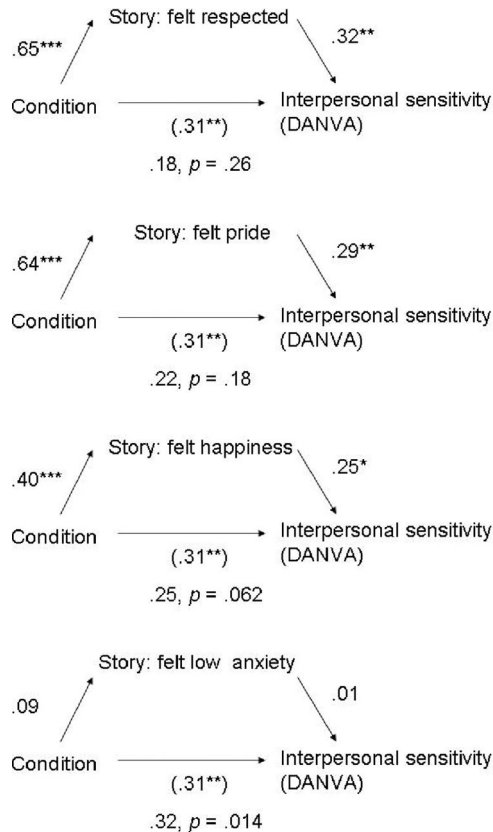


Figure 2. Felt respected and felt pride mediated the relationship between high and low power and interpersonal sensitivity, whereas felt happiness and felt low anxiety did not (numbers are standardized beta coefficients; Study 3). DANVA = Diagnostic Analysis of Nonverbal Accuracy. \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

other variables (beta for egoistic power was  $-.12$ ,  $p = .26$ , for gender it was  $-.04$ ,  $p = .69$ , and for the interaction it was  $.14$ ,  $p = .17$ ). Note that the condition did not influence how participants answered the personality scales of empathic or egoistic power. Calculating separate ANOVAs for empathic and egoistic power, with condition and gender predicting them, showed no condition effects ( $F < 1$ ), which is exactly what would be expected with random assignment to conditions.

Performing separate median splits for the empathic and the egoistic trait measure and calculating an ANOVA yields essentially the same results as the regression analyses—a significant main effect of empathic power,  $F(1, 92) = 7.67$ ,  $p = .007$ ; no significant main effect of egoistic power,  $F(1, 92) = 2.12$ ,  $p = .149$ ; and no significant interaction effect,  $F(1, 92) = 2.04$ ,  $p = .156$ . However, performing contrast calculations comparing the low empathic/high egoistic power group to the other three groups yielded significant effects: The low empathic/high egoistic power individuals were significantly lower on the DANVA-2 ( $M = 17.04$ ) than were the low empathic/low egoistic ( $p = .046$ ;  $M = 18.57$ ), the high empathic/low egoistic ( $p = .004$ ;  $M = 19.27$ ), and the high empathic/high egoistic power individuals ( $p = .003$ ;  $M = 19.56$ ).

## Discussion

Study 3 replicated the results obtained in Studies 1 and 2 with a different interpersonal sensitivity measure. Recall that in Study 2, the difference between the high-power and control conditions approached significance. When combining the effects of Studies 2 and 3 meta-analytically, high-power people were significantly more interpersonally sensitive than the people in the control group, effect size  $r = .18$  ( $r = .17$  if weighted by sample size) with a combined probability of  $Z = 2.61$ ,  $p < .005$  (Rosenthal, 1991). In contrast, people in the low-power condition did not differ significantly from people in the control condition (in both Studies 2 and 3). We can thus conclude that it is high power that makes a person interpersonally sensitive and not low power that decreases interpersonal sensitivity. This finding is important, because it underscores that high power is most likely not merely the opposite of low power. Note, however, that this result should not be overinterpreted, because whether we find a significant effect of the low-power group in comparison to the control group also depends on the strength of the manipulation. Possibly, feeling powerless instead of feeling powerful corresponds more closely to the daily experience of college students, which is why the low-power condition did not differ so much from the control condition. Another possible interpretation of why the high-power manipulation could have been stronger than the low-power manipulation is that high power might be more salient than low power because there are generally only few people who have power over many subordinates.

Study 3 also addressed the question as to whether high power indeed generates positive emotions and low power generates negative emotions and whether these emotions explain the relation between power and interpersonal sensitivity. Confirming Berdahl and Martorana (2006) and Keltner et al. (2003), we found that high-power individuals reported more positive mood and low-power individuals more negative mood (see Table 1). Moreover, we tested whether mood explains the power–interpersonal sensitivity link. This analysis showed that some emotional states did mediate the relation between power and interpersonal sensitivity. Negative states did not play a mediating role. Among the positive states, those that are highly socially defined (pride and respect) and related to social acceptance (Tracy & Robins, 2008) played more of a mediating role between power and interpersonal sensitivity than states that are more intrapsychic in nature (low anxiety and happiness in the story ratings, and happiness, cheerfulness, low anger, and optimism in the self-ratings). Feeling happy can be the result of things that are completely unrelated to social interaction partners (e.g., listening to enjoyable music), whereas feeling proud and definitely feeling respected depend on the admiration of other people. But why do feelings related to social acceptance mediate the power–interpersonal sensitivity link? To the extent that high power is understood by the powerful as a position that exists only if there are subordinates who approve of the leader (make him or her feel important, respected, and proud), interpersonal sensitivity of the powerful is enhanced because knowing subordinates' feelings, thoughts, and intentions and reacting to them appropriately will bring about the approval for the powerful individual and thus secure the powerful individual's high-power position. In other words, when a person feels proud and respected in his or her high-power position, most likely this results from adopting an

empathic leadership style instead of using coercive power (French & Raven, 1959). This also implies that as soon as the powerful define themselves in a more egoistic way, as, for instance, possessing coercive power (French & Raven, 1959), their interpersonal sensitivity decreases, which is what we investigated in Study 4.

As outlined in the introduction, we expect that people who understand power in an other-oriented and empathic way as opposed to a self-focused, egoistic way would be more interpersonally sensitive. And indeed, the more people identify with empathic power the better their interpersonal accuracy (Study 3). Moreover, individuals who have high egoistic power in combination with low empathic power—and are thus very egoistic in the way that they express power—are particularly bad at reading others. This fits the results of a study by Pickett, Gardner, and Knowles (2004) showing that individuals who are concerned with and interested in social relationships (people with a pronounced need to belong) have enhanced interpersonal sensitivity. Our result for the empathic trait composite is also in line with Hall et al.'s (1997) meta-analysis showing that power was positively related to interpersonal sensitivity, because the dominance scales in that meta-analysis were of the prosocial kind (leadership, etc.), not the arrogant kind. So, the literature relating high dominance to better decoding should be qualified to refer to the other-oriented, empathic kind of dominance.

Our result in Study 3 is especially notable, considering that we used the same priming paradigm as in Galinsky et al. (2006), who found a result inconsistent with ours in their Experiment 3. We argue in the discussion of Study 2 that there might have been differences in the power concept activated when comparing our studies to the Galinsky et al. Experiment 3. Because in Study 3 we used the same interpersonal sensitivity test as Galinsky et al., we are now in a better position to comment on this point. Due to the fact that there is hardly any difference in the DANVA-2 scores obtained by the high-power group of the Galinsky et al. experiment ( $M = 19.46$ ) and our study ( $M = 19.66$ ), we feel pretty confident that the priming did not activate different concepts of power. The difference in the results stems from the control groups (our study,  $M = 18.12$ ; Galinsky et al. experiment,  $M = 21.20$ ). Because in Experiment 3 of the Galinsky et al. studies there was no low-power condition, we do not know how the low-power people would have scored. Assuming that they scored almost the same as in our experiment ( $M = 18.00$ ), high-power people would have had higher interpersonal sensitivity than low-power people (as in the present Study 3), and the only difference between the two studies would concern the control group. Perhaps something differed in the lives of the students at the two universities that made them feel differently on “pride” and “being respected” when there was no power priming (considering that pride and being respected have emerged as the driving factors of a high score on interpersonal sensitivity in the present study). Recall that the participants in the control condition had to remember the day before. Because most of the participants took part in the study toward the end of the semester, the stories they wrote often included topics like exams or stress. So perhaps the participants in our control condition had a lower baseline of pride and feeling respected than the participants in Galinsky et al.'s Experiment 3. Conversely, perhaps the participants in the Galinsky et al. control condition felt particularly proud or respected for unknown reasons. These are only specula-

tions, of course, because we do not have any more detailed indications of the stories people told and how they felt after the priming in the Galinsky et al. study.

#### Study 4

Because we found that it was the allocation of high power that was responsible for the increase in interpersonal sensitivity (and not the allocation of low power that entailed a decrease in interpersonal sensitivity), in Study 4 we focus on high power only. Moreover, Study 3 showed that how a person identifies with power is related to how interpersonally sensitive he or she is. More specifically, the more people describe themselves as adopting power in an empathic way, the higher they score on an interpersonal sensitivity test. Similarly, if a superior's role motivation is to foster and support his or her subordinates, interpersonal sensitivity might be more pronounced than if a superior puts his or her own advancement first (Hall et al., 1997). We thus predicted that leaders identifying with an empathic leadership style (being interested in and caring about the subordinates and their advancement) would be more interpersonally sensitive than leaders identifying with an egoistic leadership style (being interested in and caring about themselves and their own advancement).

#### Method

##### Participants

Participants were 157 graduate and undergraduate students (60 men, 97 women) recruited from different universities in the French-speaking part of Switzerland. Each participant received monetary compensation (approximately \$10). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 34 years ( $M = 23$ ), were all Caucasian, and participated in groups of 2 to 5 people.

##### Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions. They read the description of an egoistic, empathic, or neutral leader (control). They were asked to take the perspective of the leader described in a paragraph. Participants were encouraged not to judge whether they liked the leader they had to identify with but just to imagine that they were that kind of a person and that they shared his or her vision of the world. In order to ascertain that there was no difference in the perception of the quality or the success of the three different leadership styles, participants in all conditions read the following paragraph right before reading the leadership description:

Imagine that you have a leadership position in a big international organization. You are the head of about 20 subordinates that are under your orders, and the firm has about 500 employees. You are admired, and you have long experience as a leader in different organizations. You constantly prove your qualities as a superior. You are successful in bringing about progress in your team, having your team achieve its goals and a maximum of productivity. Your subordinates appreciate your drive and your competence and work efficiently under your orders.

After this general introduction, which was the same for all three conditions, the leadership descriptions for each condition fol-

lowed. The descriptions of the egoistic and empathic leader used mostly the same words but differed in meaning. For instance, the egoistic leader was described as “You are mostly interested in your collaborators’ work value and less in their personality and in what they expect,” whereas the empathic leader was described as “You are equally interested in your collaborators’ work value as you are in their personality and in what they expect.” In the control condition, participants were exposed to both views and told that as a leader they had not yet made up their minds. As an example, they were told: “The other day you were present while executive leaders of your organization had a discussion. The opinions diverged. Some were of the opinion that as a leader you should be equally interested in your collaborators’ work value, in their personality, and in what they expect, while others said that it is mostly your collaborators’ work value that you should be interested in.” The complete instructions for all three conditions can be found in the Appendix.

After this role induction, participants indicated how much they felt at ease with identifying with each of the specific leadership styles on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*) ( $M = 3.29$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ).

Participants then performed an interpersonal sensitivity task, the Profile of Nonverbal Sensitivity (PONS; Rosenthal et al., 1979). The PONS consists of 40 brief video excerpts of a woman acting out different emotions and intentions. Following each video clip, participants indicated which of two answer alternatives was correct. Overall accuracy for the PONS was calculated by averaging the correct answers (theoretical range from 0 to 1;  $M = 0.70$ , range = 0.50–0.92,  $SD = 0.07$ ).

## Results

### *Ease of Identifying With Leadership Style*

If empathic power instead of egoistic power is what people prefer to identify with when given a choice, we would expect participants to prefer the empathic to the egoistic leadership perspective. This is indeed what we found: a main effect of condition,  $F(2, 152) = 16.39$ ,  $p = .0001$ , indicating that participants found it easier to identify with the empathic leader ( $M = 3.87$ ) than with the egoistic leader ( $M = 2.90$ ); the leader in the control condition was in between ( $M = 3.08$ ).

### *Empathic and Egoistic Leadership and Interpersonal Sensitivity*

We expected that participants who identified with the empathic leader would be more interpersonally sensitive than participants who identified with the egoistic leader. Also, we expected the control group to be in between. The results confirmed this prediction and yielded a main effect of condition,  $F(2, 153) = 2.49$ ,  $p = .04$  (one-tailed), indicating that participants identifying with an empathic leader were more interpersonally sensitive ( $M = 0.71$ ) than participants identifying with an egoistic leader ( $M = 0.68$ ); participants identifying with the leader in the control condition were in between ( $M = 0.70$ ). A planned contrast calculation (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1991) between the egoistic and the empathic leader condition (equivalent to a linear trend contrast) showed a significant difference,  $t_{\text{contrast}}(153) = 2.10$ ,  $p < .025$

(one-tailed), effect size  $r = .17$ . The contrast between the empathic leader and the control condition yielded a difference that approached significance,  $t_{\text{contrast}}(153) = 1.23$ ,  $p < .10$ , effect size  $r = .10$ , whereas the contrast between the egoistic leader and the control condition was nonsignificant,  $t_{\text{contrast}}(153) = 0.86$ ,  $p > .10$ , effect size  $r = .07$ . Thus, the predicted linear decrease in interpersonal sensitivity from empathic to control to egoistic leader could be confirmed. Note that including participant gender in the analysis did not alter the result, and there was no significant main effect of gender and no interaction effect with gender (all  $F$ s  $< 0.28$ ,  $p > .75$ ).

## Discussion

The goal of Study 4 was to show that the way power is understood affects interpersonal sensitivity. We predicted and found that interpersonal sensitivity was more pronounced if a person adopted an empathic as opposed to an egoistic leadership style. Study 4 thus puts an emphasis on the importance of a moderating factor, the different leadership styles. It goes without saying that one finds a wide variety of different leadership styles among different individuals (Bass, 1985). This also alludes to the fact that the power concept is not a unitary concept, as many authors have already pointed out (e.g., French & Raven, 1959; Hall, 2006; Hall et al., 2005; Hall & Schmid Mast, 2009). The effect found is mostly driven by empathic power (marginally) increasing interpersonal sensitivity and not by egoistic power decreasing interpersonal sensitivity. This parallels the finding of Study 3 in which only empathic power measured as a trait was significantly related to increased sensitivity, whereas egoistic power measured as a trait was not significantly related to decreased sensitivity. It is sometimes argued that self-serving power, or a Machiavellian attitude, requires high sensitivity toward others in order to manipulate them for one’s own goals (Whiten & Byrne, 1997). However, our findings do not support such a view. Also, in a correlational study (Austin, Farrelly, Black, & Moore, 2007), Machiavellianism was negatively and not positively related to emotional intelligence. Conversely, being a leader who feels responsible for others and puts them first entails better ability to correctly read others’ emotions, motives, and intentions.

In analogy, low-power individuals’ interpersonal sensitivity can depend on how they understand their subordinate position. For instance, it is possible that followers who understand their role as foreseeing what the superior may want them to do, and doing it even before the superior issues the order, are more interpersonally sensitive than followers who see their role as following orders and working independently on tasks once they are assigned. Such role motivation (Hall et al., 1997) can also manifest in a subordinate who wants to please his or her boss through ingratiating behavior compared to a subordinate who wants to impress his or her boss with task competence and expertise. The ingratiating subordinate might be particularly attuned to his or her superior’s nonverbal cues in order to detect signs of approval and disapproval, whereas the subordinate who wants to impress with task competence might be so busy focusing on the task that he or she is not motivated to pick up his or her superior’s nonverbal cues. Which variables potentially moderate the relation between low power and interpersonal sensitivity remains to be tested empirically. And, in the same

vein, other variables besides the egoistic–empathic differentiation might moderate how high power relates to interpersonal accuracy.

### General Discussion

The present research sheds light on the question of whether it is the high- or the low-power person who is more interpersonally sensitive. Three studies showed that experimentally manipulated high power in comparison with low power made a person better at knowing what other people think or feel. When combining the three findings meta-analytically (Rosenthal, 1991), we find an effect of  $r = .23$  (same if weighted for sample size) with a combined probability of  $Z = 3.92$ , thus significant,  $p < .0001$ . This finding is in line with research showing that personality dominance, occupational status, and social class are positively correlated with interpersonal sensitivity (Hall et al., 1997; Hall & Halberstadt, 1994; Rosenthal et al., 1979). More specifically, we found that it is high power that makes a person interpersonally sensitive and not low power that decreases interpersonal sensitivity.

Note that we used different methodological approaches for assessing the dependent variable as well as for manipulating the independent variable. Study 1 used a role playing task with randomly assigned high- and low-power roles, Study 2 used implicit priming of high and low power, and Study 3 used explicit priming of high and low power. As for the interpersonal sensitivity measure, we used the empathic accuracy paradigm (thus measuring how accurately the spontaneously elicited thoughts and feelings of others were assessed; Studies 1 and 2), an emotion recognition task based on posed expressions (Study 3), and a nonverbal decoding task (Study 4). Therefore, the consistent results across studies cannot be explained by shared method variance. We feel that especially the use of videotapes featuring real-life interactions between two people (Studies 1 and 2) is an ecologically valid measure of interpersonal sensitivity that adds appreciably to the generalizability of the findings.

An additional question was the possible mechanism explaining the link between power and interpersonal sensitivity. In the introduction we suggested two possible explanations, which could be confirmed partly. We hypothesized that high power would entail a rather global, and low power a rather local, information processing style, which in turn would be responsible for increased or decreased interpersonal sensitivity. Although we have only indirect evidence to support our claim, we think it constitutes a viable explanation. In Study 2, we excluded motivational and emotional factors by using an implicit priming procedure with stimuli that were matched on valence. Although research has shown that high-power priming resulted in a more global processing style (Smith & Trope, 2006; Smith, Wigboldus, & Dijksterhuis, 2008) and that this more global processing style is responsible for increased interpersonal sensitivity (Ambady & Gray, 2002; Bombari et al., 2009; Patterson & Stockbridge, 1998), to answer the question of whether the processing style indeed mediates the relation remains to be tested empirically. Future research should include the assessment of all three variables in the same study in order to test for the predicted effect.

With respect to emotion as a potential mediator, Study 3 showed that the results were not merely driven by the pure valence of the primed high- or low-power role. Thus, high-power people feeling

more positive and/or low-power people feeling more negative did not explain the relation between power and interpersonal sensitivity. Instead, what mattered is a very specific aspect of positive emotion: Feeling proud and being respected were the emotional states at least partially responsible for the high-power person being more interpersonally sensitive than the low-power person. We think that these feelings are related to different ways of endorsing power. People who adopt a rather empathic, other-oriented leadership style are more likely to be socially accepted (i.e., to feel proud and respected), and that is why they are more interpersonally sensitive, which explains the positive relation between identifying with empathic power and increased interpersonal sensitivity (Study 3) and the finding that empathic leaders are more interpersonally sensitive than egoistic leaders (Study 4).

In sum, while cognitive information processing style might explain the why of the power–interpersonal sensitivity link, differences in conceiving the high-power role seem to explain the when: The more the high-power position is understood as empathic and other-oriented, the more the power holder is interpersonally sensitive. For high-power individuals, possessing elevated interpersonal sensitivity is a definite advantage, because it is related to good leadership (i.e., leadership yielding positive outcomes such as increased effectiveness, productivity, or collaborator satisfaction). For instance, individual consideration (understood as attending to the follower's needs and concerns) is considered to be an important aspect of transformational leadership (Bass, Avolio, Jung, & Berson, 2003), and emotional intelligence (which contains aspects of interpersonal sensitivity) has been shown to be a core ingredient for successful leadership (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004; Palmer, Walls, Burgess, & Stough, 2001). Also, powerful individuals are likely to profit more from correctly reading others in general (not only their subordinates) than powerless individuals, because they are the ones who negotiate with others, make decisions based on information obtained from others, and establish new contacts with potential business partners, to give just a few examples. All of these activities profit from increased interpersonal accuracy (Byron, Teranova, & Nowicki, 2007; Elfenbein, Foo, White, Tan, & Aik, 2007; Rubin, Munz, & Bommer, 2005).

In conclusion, further research should focus less on the main effect of power on outcomes and more on the moderating or mediating variables affecting the relation between power and the measured outcomes (Hall et al., 2005). There is accumulating evidence in the literature that different factors indeed influence how power manifests (Chen et al., 2001; Hall, 2006; Hall et al., 2005; Hall & Schmid Mast, 2009; Lammers et al., 2008). Our Studies 3 and 4 clearly demonstrate that when power is socially referenced in a positive way—feeling proud and respected or being empathic—interpersonal sensitivity increases.

One of the limitations of the present studies is that interpersonal sensitivity was not assessed with respect to a face-to-face interaction partner. Although we had good methodological reasons for using standardized paradigms to measure interpersonal sensitivity, it is still important to know whether the results are similar with respect to being able to infer the interaction partner's thoughts and feelings, or more specifically whether the high-power person is more likely to be accurate about his or her low-power interaction partner or vice versa. Recall that Hall, Rosip, et al. (2006) found low-power people (according to experimental assignment to inter-

active roles) to be more accurate but only because the high-power people were easier to read (see also Snodgrass et al., 1998). Note that we did not assess interpersonal sensitivity toward high- or low-power targets but toward target individuals in general. The increased accuracy of high-power individuals is thus not specifically tailored toward their subordinates. In fact, the question of whether superiors or high-status people are equally good at reading their business partners, their opponents, and their subordinates is a question yet to be pursued empirically.

We did not test whether people in established hierarchies, thus real superiors and their subordinates, differ in interpersonal sensitivity the same way that our participants did. In real hierarchical settings, additional factors could come into play, such as competing cognitive demands on the superior that might work against his or her interpersonal sensitivity. On the other hand, in a real hierarchical situation the importance of interpersonal sensitivity might be even more salient to leaders than was the case in the present experiments, and furthermore, real leaders may acquire superior knowledge about nonverbal communication as the result of workplace demands, or they might have been selected in part for their communication skills. Indeed, as noted earlier there is evidence that superiors in a workplace hierarchy are more interpersonally sensitive than subordinates (Rosenthal et al., 1979).

Occupying different power positions not only affects how we behave toward others but also how we perceive and interpret the world around us and particularly our social interaction partners. The present research expands this research tradition, in that we showed that high power relative to low power increased how good a job a person does in assessing others. We also showed that this increase in interpersonal sensitivity was due to people readily identifying with positive and rewarding aspects of high power (e.g., feeling proud and respected) and that when high power was understood in an other-oriented way (as in empathic leadership) it increased interpersonal sensitivity. Thus, exercising empathic power makes people interpersonally sensitive most likely because it makes them feel valued.

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(Appendix follows)

## Appendix

## Instructions for the Three Different Conditions of Study 4

The description of the empathic leader reads as follows:

You are equally interested in your collaborators' work value as you are in their personality and in what they expect. You feel responsible above all for them and their personal advancement. You motivate your team by fixing clear objectives and by helping them to complete the tasks. You look after your collaborators' interests and you know how to defend them against the management of the organization. You count on the team's performance influencing everybody's good standing within the organization. If you have to make important decisions, you pay careful attention to the consequences of those decisions for everybody and not only for you personally.

If your collaborators easily accept your orders this is due to your commercial success and to your competence as a leader. You often think about how to improve the organization's ethic. If there are decisions to make that could have negative consequences for your collaborators, you ask them for their opinion and you pursue the collective interests. In order for the team to achieve its goals you think that good teamwork is more efficient than a tough and directive leadership style.

The description of the egoistic leader reads as follows:

You are mostly interested in your collaborators' work value and less in their personality and in what they expect. You feel responsible above all for yourself and your personal advancement. You motivate your team by fixing clear objectives and by controlling the completed tasks. You look after your own interests and you know how to defend yourself against the management of the organization. You count on your performance influencing your good standing in front of your own supervisors. If you have to make important decisions, you pay careful attention to the consequences of those decisions for you personally.

If your collaborators easily accept your orders this is due to your commercial success and to your competence as a leader. You often think about how to improve your own reputation within the organization. If there are decisions to make that could have negative consequences for your collaborators, you trust your experience and you pursue your own interests. In order for you to achieve your goals you think that a tough and directive leadership style is more efficient than good teamwork.

The description of the leader in the control condition read as follows:

The other day you were present while executive leaders of your organization had a discussion. The opinions diverged. Some were of the opinion that as a leader you should be equally interested in your collaborators' work value, in their personality, and in what they expect, while others said that it is mostly your collaborators' work value you should be interested in. Some said that they felt responsible for the advancement of their collaborators, whereas others felt only responsible for their own advancement. The former said that they helped their collaborators to complete the tasks, whereas the latter said that they controlled the completed tasks.

Some were of the opinion that looking after your collaborators' interests and defending them against the management of the organization when necessary was important. Moreover, they also pointed out that the team performance affects all members' reputation. Others were of the opinion that you should look after your own interests and defend your own rights and that the performance reflects on the leader's own good standing in front of the supervisors. If you have to make important decisions, some advocated that it is important to pay careful attention to the consequences of those decisions for every team member, while others advocated paying attention above all to the consequences that affect the leader personally.

If the collaborators accept those leaders' orders easily, this is due to their commercial success and to their competence as a leader. Some leaders often think about how to improve the organization's ethic, and others often think about how to improve their own reputation. If there are decisions to make that could have negative consequences for the collaborators, some leaders ask them for their opinion and pursue the collective interest, while other leaders trust their experience and pursue their own interests. Some think that in order for the team to achieve its goals, good teamwork is more efficient than a tough and directive leadership style, while others think the contrary. You as a leader have not yet made up your mind about those issues.

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